

# Mandatory Boat Inspections, Decontamination Proposed

By Buzz Lamb

The third and final "Open House" discussion sponsored by the Lake George Park Commission on September 27 at the Bolton town hall drew a larger crowd than the two previous meetings. This was the last opportunity for the public to offer suggestions to the Commission regarding the plan to protect Lake George from new invasive species.

The Park Commission retained the LA Group in June of this year to make a recommendation for the prevention of aquatic invasive species (AIS) spread into the lake. The project goal was to present a feasible plan that will avoid future new AIS introductions to the greatest extent possible.

In collaboration with AIS subcommittee of the Commission, research of various spread-management programs was conducted. Based on the research and public input received, the LA Group made a recommendation to the Commission at their monthly meeting two days prior: mandatory boat inspections would provide the highest level of protection for Lake George.

The question now is: if adopted by the Commission, how will a mandatory inspection system be funded? According to the LA Group, funding will likely come from a variety of sources rather than a single funding stream.

Dave Wick, Park Commission executive director, estimated the cost of an inspection/decontamination program would be \$150 to \$200 per boat. "There is no way we can charge a boater that amount. It will have to be subsidized in some way," he said. Wick said a cost of \$50 is considered to be the upper limit that would be tolerable.

The LA Group said in addition to inspection/decontamination fees, potential funding sources might include an increase in boat and dock fees (no increase since 2002), Warren County Occupancy Tax (\$270,000 was approved by the board of supervisors for eradication

efforts on Sept. 28), contributions by towns and villages, donations from individuals and non-profit organizations, federal and/or state grants, the creation of a park-wide special tax district or a portion of sales tax revenues earmarked for the program.

According to Wick, if Warren County raised its sales tax rate one-quarter of one percent, 20% of that increase would cover the entire cost of the inspection/decontamination process. "That's a conversation we are having with the county right now," he said.

Currently, the Commission's annual budget of \$1.2 million is supported by approximately 16,000 boats that register for use on Lake George each year. According to Wick, approximately one-third of those boats are "transient" (boats coming to Lake George from 193 water bodies in 15 different states, according to studies). "The primary source of invasives is transient boaters," Wick said.

Wick said there are 103 known launch sites on Lake George. "This program will be a process of risk management," Wick said. "Are we going to be able to inspect every boat that launches into Lake George? Probably not," he said.

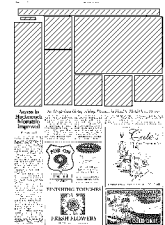
Wick said the next step will be for the LA Group to present a final draft by mid-October for the Commissioner's assessment and they will most likely vote on the proposal at their November meeting.

The final draft will then be sent to Albany to be approved by Gov. Cuomo. If approved by the governor, the data and information collected to date will then be presented in a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) format for public consideration, a process which takes 45 days.

The GEIS will be prepared according to the State's Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), Article 8 of the Environmental Conservation Law, requiring government agencies to

analyze the environmental, social and economic impacts of their actions.

Based on public comments received, the GEIS will be revised and finalized to support promulgation of the regulations. The final decision on the new rules lies entirely on the governor's office. "The fastest this could be accomplished is probably May or June of 2013," Wick said. "That's if everything goes as planned."





*The Lake George Park Commission initiated a pilot project this past summer to test the effectiveness and efficiency of boat washing stations. The equipment was first demonstrated on Beach Road during the Lake George Performance Weekend.*